MISS TEEN AMERICA

I caught a few minutes of MISS TEEN USA and I think if we ever again invade Panama or Grenada or another one of those tough countries in a display of national heroism, we ought to send those 51 women, vaselined teeth, depilated pubes and all; hey, who would fire on an aerobic squad decked out in pink spandex? Some of those women--weary, no doubt, from all that smiling and bootlicking--had a feral look and I expected to see them gnawing right out of the tube any minute. I could see myself running down the hall of the apartment with a rabid teenager clamped to each ankle. Mostly innies, did you notice that? I think they discriminate against outies at the pageants. Maybe they make the entrants have plastic surgery the way they make most of them shave off their natural eyebrows so the brows will match those false lashes. Next time you go to a pageant, ask the duty surgeon if you can see his collection of entrants' outies.

Each one of these pageants is a two hour ad for the next one. The show promotes the illusion of glamour to your daughter so she will mail in her entry blank and join the supply of fresh meat that must be kept in reserve to ensure that the entire system does not collapse of its own emptiness. This is plastic America at its apex. All that dressing and undressing, all that anxiety, all those mommies out there wringing their hands as the judges push the buttons. I always wonder at those numbers. How would I feel if my ass was only a 6.73? Twelve finalists are chosen and each in turn lights up and gushes and hugs someone nearby before hurrying down to line up at the front of the stage. What has happened, of course, is that her 39 fellow anorexics have just been defined as losers and their fretful mommies are weeping out in the dark somewhere--a whole year of dance and voice lessons down the tubes, all that rotten disco music listened to for zip. There follows a two hour war of attrition as woman after woman is computed away from the glittery little crown.

All of this takes place in Mississippi this year and these contests are mainly a Southern trip. It's still 1860 there where the slave block lives on, its black worker replaced by a glossy teenager who will win the privilege of selling makeup and other useless crap to her peers until next summer when she will be replaced by a clone of herself. Oh, not all these young women will go into the service of ad companies; a few will connect and become the mistresses of the rich, and one or two will even marry into money, become company wives with the privilege of entertaining their husbands' friends. This has been a major lure since beauty pageants replaced the Ziegfield Follies. This is white Mississippi we are watching in this pageant. No black people. No poverty. No footage of the real Mississippi. You have to watch Les Blank's films for that.

Onstage the women crisscross in their bathingsuits and high heels. No nipples. These are playthings here, not mothers. Nipples are for nursing so they have to be hidden. The women are clustered around the stage in ridiculous poses conceived by some women-hating clod and one can't help but ask how so many are so easily conned so often. The last two wait alone in the video eye and then there is one, the winner, the chump who gets the privilege of promoting the products, of posing in front of countless assholes in countless malls around the country, the loser who has been conned into thinking herself a winner because she fits into the mold programmed into the pageant computer. Tears. Applause. Waving, bowing, scraping, and cut to commercial. The real winners can go home and forget about it--until the next pageant is announced. -C.G.
7/16/90

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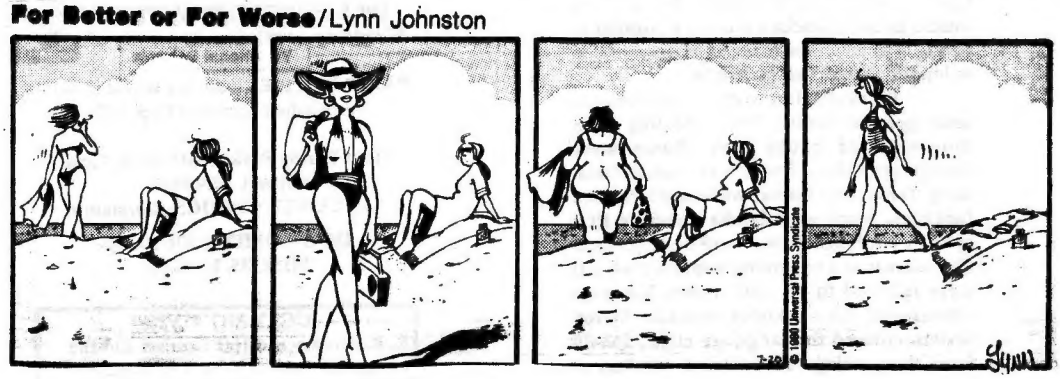
For Better or For Worse/Lynn Johnston



COMIX PLUGOLA

Mary Fleener sent me a copy of her SLUTBURGER STORIES. Great cover and a number of interesting little vignettes re life in the fast lane in Southern California. I suspect the title is more surreal than pejorative. Spain, as I recall, once did a story for YOUNG LUST entitled BURGER SLUT. Fleener often fuses cubistic art with a realistic story line and her page designs lean toward iconography. Her chiarooscuro technique is quite effective in the black and white medium. --Clay Geerdes

Another nice story by Mike Sagara in HEY, NEETERS 6. Mike has a tight cartooning style and a fine ear for dialogue. $1.50 pp from him, Saga Graphics, POB 1378, Belmont, CA 94002.

Market research has had an extraordinary effect upon the American public. The average citizen is so well accustomed to answering any number of idiot questions about himself that he has become quite incapable of telling strangers to mind their own damned business. Virtually anyone will reveal virtually anything about himself once he is convinced that the questions are purposeless, designed only to facilitate the waste of corporate time and money.

Lawrence Block
AFTER THE FIRST DEATH, 1969

Check out MEAN STREETS, a critical DZ run on a computer. Easy to read. Howard Cruse writes on censurship. Get #4 for $1 pp from Concrete Caverns Graphix, 70-A Greenwich Ave., Suite 186, New York, NY 10011.

All you have to do to educate a child is leave him alone and teach him to read. The rest is brainwashing.

-Ellen Gilchrist

The writer must trust the reader to be at least as intelligent as he is. Only in such a well wishing and trust, only when the writer feels he is writing a letter to a good friend, only then will the magic happen.

-Ellen Gilchrist

X-RATED FUNNIES

Would you believe Lynn Johnston got away with having Elizabeth show her Daddy an essay on "The Copulation of Canada" in her June 5 FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE strip? Times change. Jack Katz told me once about the clean-up guys who work for the syndicates. One of their chores is to white out hands the artist has accidentally or deliberately drawn in the wrong area, i.e., too close to a breast or crotch, and place them in neutral positions. The Johnston strip was a play on Liz's misspelling, but it would never have run in the days of Captain Patterson.

While it is true that Underground comix broke the hold of the Comics Code of 1954, this could not have happened had not wider subcultural changes taken place simultaneously. Underground newspapers were far more critical in the battle against censorship and it was in these weekly tabloid papers that the comix were first seen and read by most of us at that time.

I read a piece in MEAN STREETS which labelled the underground comix misogynistic; well, there were misanthropic comix drawn during this period as well and I'm growing weary of this constant genderbashing. There are only two sexes and every artist, man or woman, draws both of them and how they are drawn depends on a great many factors. A drawn figure whether it appears in a comic book or on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is not a real person. Art deals with fantasy figures and I am no more certain that it is feasible to call an artist a sexist for drawing his fantasy woman with big breasts than it is to call him a democrat for drawing unflattering caricatures of Nixon and Reagan and Bush. The way a man or woman draws the opposite sex depends upon a combination of skill and orientation. Guy Colwell was trying to deal with this in his recent DOLL series.

Is it possible that the idealization of human character in art is inherently sexist? If I am going to draw a fantasy woman and involve her in my own personal fantasy via comic art, I am going to draw her any way I wish to draw her. The size of her breasts is up to me and what happens to her in the story is whatever keeps me interested. When Robert Crumb drew his sex comix in the early seventies and published them in SNATCH, JIZ, and BIG ASS COMIX, he never suggested that the fantasies were anyone else's--they were *his*. The people who bought and read his fantasies did so of their own free will and those who argued that what Crumb was doing was degrading women have a valid argument only if they accept those creatures in Crumb's comic as real women. I do not. They are not. *Beauty pageants are degrading to women; comic fantasies are not. In the contests, real women are paraded around onstage in skimpy bathing suits and high heeled shoes. This is meat market exploitation. Crumb's weird sex fantasies are either funny to you or they are not, but they have not sold a single woman into corporate slavery.*

Underground comix were a mixture of humor and political satire and unconventional ideas and while they amused me and my friends, I am sure they offended the hell out of parents trying to raise their children and keep them on the straight and narrow path. The comix were not one thing, but many, and it is a mistake to try to talk about them in general, but we always try because of space limitations. I can tell you that in my collection there are comix dealing with a lot more themes than sex, drugs and rock and roll music. I would suggest a look at the comix of Georg Metzger whose MOONDOG and TRUCKIN' depict the retribalization theme and assimilate many of the ideas that were afloat in the subcultural stream of the late sixties. Look at the work of Rand Holmes and Shary Flenniken and Bobby London and Joyce Farmer and countless others who produced a great deal of grassroots comic writing and art. Hey, to refer to underground comix collectively as sexist or even exclusively male is to deny the work of hundreds of artists who were consciously writing and drawing stories that opposed sexism. Had it not been for the pioneers who created underground comix and fought for their independence, there would have been no women's comix movement.

From the beginning, the women's comix movement was supported by some men--not all, there were many who hated the women's comix and still do. It was Ron Turner who put up the money for the benefit comic that became IT AIN'T ME BABE, COMIX, the first women's comic. The first comic book to be written, drawn, and published by women was TITS 'N' CLITS. Now at first the women cartoonists, most of whom lived with or were married to male underground cartoonists, having had their consciousnesses raised by the women's liberation movement which appeared in Berkeley for the first time in the Fall of 1969, wanted to be in the comix being done by the men and the men wouldn't let them in. If the men had let them in, the women's comix movement might have become nothing but a footnote to male underground comix; as it was this rejection spurred groups of women to do it for themselves. Thus WIMMEN'S COMIX became an overtly sexist comic book, right? It is if you define sexist as that which excludes a contributor on the basis of gender. I remember hearing women put down ZAP as a boys' club, because by issue 3 it was closed door, a group of men who claimed the space for themselves. But what evolved was not all separatist politics, because there were comic books and magazines that included both sexes. Dan O'Neill's Air Pirates Studio in San Francisco trained a number of young women artists, some of whom went on to lengthy careers as cartoonists.

It's next to impossible to summarize underground comix. We're dealing with thousands of books here. Some were autobiographical. Some were subcultural drug fantasies. Some were esoteric sex fantasies. Some were books drawn to fit a specific audience. Some were underground alternatives to overground superheroes. All were referred to as adult comix however adolescent the fantasies therein. When sexism entered the language circa 1968-69 from the writings of feminist scholars at Smith and Sarah Lawrence, it caused a lot of artistic reaction on both sides. There were comix that attacked sexists and comics that poked fun at the attackers, books like Bob Sidebottom's SUPERBITCH. Is a parody of a parody of a sexist fantasy sexist? The entire debate expanded to absurd proportions.

In the end underground comix became a marginal business dominated by men and it still is. A few women-owned companies may still exist on paper but they seldom produce any books. As of mid-1990, the major publishers of underground material are Last Gasp Comix, Rip Off Press, Kitchen Sink, and Fantagraphics. Of these four, only Rip Off Press is supported exclusively by underground publications. The others make their main income from other materials. --Clay Geerdes

COMIX PLUGOLA

Robert Pasternak's ACID MAN 13 and 14 are available from Comix Wave for $1/stamp. Entire set of 14 for $6.50 pp.

Some new work by Ed DeVore and Garry Hardman appears in CALCULATED RISK 1. This book should be available at your local dealer soon for $2.50. If you would like to contact Ed about contributing to a future issue, write to him at RD 7, Box 86, Meadville, PA 16335.

The following new minicomix should be ordered from Starhead Comix, POB 30044, Seattle, WA 98103.

TESTOSTERONE CITY by Peter Bagge. $1/stamp.

STORM WARNINGS/ Steve Willis $2.45 pp.

DOG BITS, MORTY THE DOG 2 $2.45 pp.

BAD TEENS by J. R. Williams. 90¢ pp.

LUMP SOUP SCIOLPLUILEAS! [Chester Brown and Steve Willis] 80¢ pp.

Bruce Duncan is still cartooning. He recently did a booklet of THE NATURE AND SPIRIT CARTOON SHOW and he might run you a copy for $3 pp. You've seen Duncan's work in recent issues of WEIRDO. Mail reaches him at BEFP/2425 College Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704.

Jaka's Story continues in CEREBUS 134, 135, and the CEREBUS reprint series is now up to #37. Check your local comic book store.

The latest from NICE DAY COMIX, 911 Park St. S. W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6241:

DICK HUNGRY: PRIVATE EYE for 50¢/stamp., a minicomic parody of MS. TREE.

PAPER DOLLIES from the world of self-published comics. $3 pp. DZ

From Randy Paske, 4841 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 9631.

ALL COVER COMICS, 25¢/stamp.

DOG COMIX 5, 50¢/stamp.

MISC 35. $1.95 pp.

UGLY ART LIVES

R. K. Sloane and Jeff Gaither did the art for the latest CD by The Accused.